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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [KCRM](#) [KHIV](#) [SF](#)
SUBJECT: SAG'S EFFORTS TO CURB GENDER VIOLENCE SLOWLY MOVES
IN RIGHT DIRECTION

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Raymond Brown. Reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka officially launched the SAG's "365 Days National Action Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children" on International Women's Day (8 March) despite the conspicuous absence of an action plan. Mlambo-Ngcuka claimed that South Africa is the first country to develop a comprehensive plan to end violence against women, but later told the audience of about 400 people that "we need more details on the 365 day calendar of events with assigned tasks and activities. Until we produce this, the 365 campaign is incomplete." (Note: In May 2006, 260 representatives from government, civil society, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and traditional authorities signed the Kopanong Declaration to ensure the implementation of the National Action Plan.)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN ON THE RISE

¶2. (SBU) Deputy President Mlambo-Ngcuka told the audience that the level of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse experienced by women and children is unacceptably high and growing. She believes that parental neglect, lack of solidarity with victims, women and children's disempowerment, poor law enforcement, and poverty contribute to the challenge. To drive home her point, she recited some sobering statistics:

-- South Africa's Medical Research Council reports that one in nine rapes are reported every year. Last year, around 55,000 rapes were reported to police. (NOTE: The true extent of violence in South Africa is unknown. Though the Medical Research Council reported one in nine rapes are reported, Statistics South Africa found that one in two rape survivors reported the rape to police. END NOTE)

-- One in three high school-aged girls lose their virginity during a rape.

-- Only seven to 10 percent of rapists are convicted.

-- Half of violent abuse is at the hands of someone personally known or respected, which complicates the problem. "Home is no longer a sanctuary for many women," said Mlambo-Ngcuka.

-- Five out of six men are not abusers, but the majority remain silent despite the fact that it is their daughters,

wives, or girlfriends who are victims.

-- Sixty percent of men still think a woman who wears a knee-length or shorter skirt is sending out a sexual message.

These statistics echo those in NEPAD's Peer Review of South Africa, which quoted estimates that half of all women will be raped in their lifetime, 85 percent of all rapes are gang rapes, and 1 in 4 women are in an abusive relationship.

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS TO GO

¶3. (U) Mlambo-Ngcuka singled out six positive developments made over the past couple of years, yet noted that none of them have gone far enough:

-- Courts have toughened up on gender violence, but Mlambo-Ngcuka also cautioned that there are still courts, judges, and magistrates that trivialize these crimes and send the wrong signals during sentencing.

-- The Children's Bill has been passed by the National Assembly, and legislation is in the pipeline to combat trafficking in persons. However, the Sexual Offences Bill, which among other things broadens the definition of rape, is yet to be finalized. Mlambo-Ngcuka admitted that she is "truly embarrassed" that the Sexual Offences Bill has been sitting in Parliament for almost eight years. As a result, those who commit anal rape or rape same-sex children or adults are given lesser sentences.

-- Integrated approaches like the Thuthuzela Care Centers (TCC) show promise. She used the Thuthuzela Centre at Jooste

Hospital in Manenberg as an example since it links directly to the Sexual Offences Court in Wynberg, and has been shown to yield a much higher percentage conviction rate, compared to success rates in other courts. However, she pointed out that these centers are few and far between. (NOTE: South Africa's TCC model was developed by the SAG in the early 2000's to respond to rape victims. The TCC model has attracted international interest and Chile has adopted the model. USAID supported the opening of the first five TCCs, including the one at Jooste Hospital. The SAG intends to build 80 TCCs during the next three years, 15 of which will be USG funded through PEPFAR and the Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative. END NOTE)

-- Treatment and care have received greater attention. The Department of Health has launched a National Sexual Assault Policy to meet the overall health needs of the rape survivor.

-- Media coverage of sexual assaults has improved, but still tends to glamorize unacceptable sexual behavior.

HIV/AIDS ADDRESSED

¶4. (C) Immediately after speaking out about the media sending mixed messages on sexual behavior, Mlambo-Ngcuka spoke briefly about HIV/AIDS, but failed to make an explicit connection. She told the audience that, "HIV-positive people needed to eat well, exercise, and live a healthy and positive life;" that "if you need to be on medication, take it religiously to ensure that you live longer;" and that "young people need to delay their sexual debut and always use protection."

¶5. (C) Veering from her speech, which was handed out at the beginning of the ceremony, Mlambo-Ngcuka also added that "good nutrition can delay full-blown AIDS; the world agrees with us now even though they misunderstood us before." She also said that HIV-positive persons should not infect others or "re-infect themselves." (COMMENT: Though she explained

herself by saying that people should not engage in risky behavior after they are diagnosed, this type of comment could send the wrong message that HIV/AIDS is curable. END COMMENT)

COMMENT

16. (C) According to the statistics, almost every South African has been affected by violence against women and/or children either directly or through someone they know. The SAG's public acknowledgement of the enormity and complexity of the problem is a step in the right direction, but the country still has miles to go. South Africa continues to have the highest number of reported rapes in the world. It also has the second largest population of HIV-positive persons. There are no statistics on the number of women or men infected through rape, but the SAG must address both problems simultaneously if it wants to slow the interdependent crises.

17. (C) The government will not be able to do it alone. Raising awareness of the issue or passing new legislation will go a long way, provided judges implement the laws. However, the only lasting solution is changing societal attitudes toward gender violence. The SAG's holistic approach of including civil society, trade unions, faith-based organizations, and traditional authorities is a sound strategy that hopefully will attain results.
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